

Rep. Eric Robertson

31st District

1998 Legislative Principles

- 1 Remain steadfast in the commitment to protect taxpayers** by holding the line on state spending, continuing to seek additional tax relief, and opposing any attempt to undo the I-601 spending limit.
- 2 Continue efforts to improve the quality of our schools** — with a special emphasis on doing a better job of teaching reading — so that our children will be better equipped to learn throughout their educational careers.
- 3 Work to protect our families, our homes and our communities from the threat of crime** — with a special effort made to improve the security and monitoring of juvenile detention facilities — by stopping dangerous criminals from being let loose in our communities where they pose a danger to our safety.

- 4 Strengthen laws to hold drunk drivers responsible** for the tragedies they create and ensure they are kept off our streets through license revocation, increased penalties and other overdue actions.
- 5 Make government more accountable to the citizens** it's supposed to serve by eliminating the expensive mass of outdated, unnecessary and ineffective rules and regulations that clog the state bureaucracy and harm citizens.
- 6 Responsibly and effectively meet the transportation needs of our state**, including reducing traffic congestion and improving freight mobility, without raising taxes.

Questions about the Q&A 1998 Washington State Legislature

Q: How large is the state's budget surplus and how can it be used?

A: The state general fund budget for the 1997-99 biennium is currently projected to have a surplus of \$861 million. This amount is made up of leftover funds from the previous budget period, along with expected revenues for the current biennium that are in excess of the \$19.1 billion general fund appropriation adopted last year by the Legislature.

Initiative 601 requires that surplus funds beyond a certain level be placed in an emergency reserve fund. At present, the amount of the current surplus that must be held in reserve is about \$194 million. Money in this account can only be spent with the approval of two-thirds of both the House and Senate.

This leaves \$667 million in available surplus funds. However, the spending limit established by I-601 allows only \$185 million to be spent beyond the general fund appropriation made last year.

One of our objectives this session is to hold the line on overall spending in the budget and continue our trend of dramatically slowing the growth of government. We expect that as much as \$100 million in budget savings will be identified due to efficiencies in government, as well as lower than expected school enrollments and welfare caseloads.

Possible uses for the surplus include providing further permanent tax relief, including a reduction in the tax you pay each year to license your automobile, increasing the reserve fund, or paying for needed road repairs and highway improvements without increasing the gas tax.

It is almost certain that some portion of the surplus will be used to accomplish each of these objectives.

Q: How did the surplus get to be this large?

A: The surplus is the result of current state revenues far exceeding state spending.

Two major factors are responsible for this strong fiscal situation. One is our state's growing economy which is generating strong revenues. The other is the restraint in government spending that has been imposed since 1994 — thanks to both the limits established by I-601 and responsible legislative budget policy that has kept spending significantly below that limit.

For example, in 1997, our efforts resulted in the smallest budget growth in 25 years.

Q: Do you support the governor's proposed 11-cent-per-gallon increase in the state gas tax?

A: No, I do not support the governor's plan to raise the gas tax by an immediate 5 cents per gallon, along with automatic future increases that would increase the tax by about 11 cents over the next few years. At the current 23 cents per gallon, Washington's state gas tax is already the 17th highest in the nation. In addition, with a budget surplus of already over \$850 million, I do not believe we should be asking taxpayers to give us more of their money.

However, while I oppose a gas tax increase, I am strongly committed to finding responsible and effective solutions to the traffic congestion problems we face. As our population grows, so will the strains on our transportation

system. Further, our economy depends on an efficient road system, so that goods and people can be moved in a timely manner. Without a solid infrastructure, our economic competitiveness will be greatly compromised.



Rep. Robertson discusses transportation legislation with House Speaker Clyde Ballard

Q: Can transportation improvements be made without a tax hike?

A: Yes.

Since gaining majorities in the Legislature, Republicans have thrown out the old tax-and-spend mentality in Olympia — and transportation is a good example of the change. The past three years, nearly \$300 million of efficiency improvements and savings have been identified in the state's transportation budget and directed to fund new road projects. This year, an audit authorized by the Legislature is being conducted of all the transportation agencies to identify even more savings.

However, improving agency efficiency is not enough of a solution. Like the governor, Republicans in the Legislature have also proposed fully funding \$2.4 billion in new transportation projects over the next six years — but with one big difference. Our plan would not increase the gas tax.

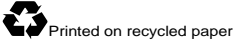
These are the components of the Republican proposal:

- 1** Use more MVET money for transportation. Right now, only 16 percent of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET), the tax you pay when licensing your car each year, funds new roads. Our plan would transfer more MVET revenue from the general fund to the transportation budget.
- 2** Use the existing budget surplus. A portion of the state's \$861 million budget surplus would be used to fill the hole left in the general fund from the MVET transfer, protecting other priorities like education. A healthy \$500 million reserve would also remain.
- 3** Cut the "car tab tax." The annual tax owners pay to license their cars would be reduced by about \$45 per vehicle. The governor's proposed cut was just \$35.

In short, both plans provide the same amount of money for transportation projects. Both reduce the motor vehicle excise tax. And both protect programs supported by the general fund, including education. The only difference is that the Republican plan accomplishes these objectives without a tax increase.

State Representative
Eric Robertson

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600



BULK RATE
U. S. POSTAGE PAID
Permit #92
Olympia, Washington

Q: What progress is being made in fighting crime?

A: During the past three years, significant steps have been taken to improve the safety of our neighborhoods and communities, including the approval of “Three Strikes, You’re Out” and “Hard Time for Armed Crime” legislation.

Last year, the Legislature adopted the first meaningful and effective change in the juvenile justice system in over two decades. The key? Giving police, prosecutors and judges the authority and flexibility they need to provide an appropriate sentence every time a teen-ager breaks the law — beginning with the first offense.

This year, we will continue our efforts to protect the public by addressing problems in security and supervision at juvenile facilities and groups homes. Changes we adopt will help ensure these facilities adequately protect the public from harm by the offenders they house to keep our communities safe.

We are also working on ways to toughen penalties for those who drive while drunk. We are considering increased jail time, vehicle impoundment, automatic license suspension, and other measures that emphasize keeping drunk drivers off the road.

Note about our district office: Now that the Legislature is back in session, we have temporarily close our in-district office. After this year’s session is over, we will again open the office to make government more accessible for you. Look for details on the district office this spring.

We want to hear from you!

Attend one of our town hall meetings...

Auburn	Enumclaw	Bonney Lake
Saturday, Feb. 21 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Saturday, Feb. 21 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Saturday, Feb. 21 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.
City Council Chamber 25 West Main	Enumclaw Com. Center 1350 Cole St.	Bonney Lake Sr. Center 19306 Bonney Lake Blvd.

Or join us in Olympia for the day!

31st District Day at the State Capitol

Wednesday, Feb. 25.
10 a.m. in the Capitol Rotunda

Join us in Olympia for the day to tour the state Capitol campus, have lunch with us and see firsthand the state Legislature in session.

Please contact our offices to RSVP by Feb. 23:

Rep. Eric Robertson (360) 786-7846	Rep. Les Thomas (360) 786-7866
---------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Call the Toll-Free Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000



State Representative
Eric Robertson

House Majority Caucus Chair
407 Legislative Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7846
robertso_er@leg.wa.gov

Dear Friends,

It is an honor to serve as your state representative in Olympia, working on your behalf to make government more accountable and responsive, and to improve the way government treats its citizens.

This newsletter is designed to provide you with comprehensive answers to the questions most asked about the 1998 legislative session. However, to accomplish my goal of being a strong voice for you in the Legislature, it’s essential that I hear your thoughts, ideas and opinions about what’s important. In the coming weeks, I encourage you to attend some of the events Rep. Les Thomas and I have scheduled to hear directly from you and other citizens we represent.

We have organized a series of town hall meetings throughout the district on Saturday, Feb. 21. Information about the meetings, including times and locations, can be found on back. We would also like to invite you to join us in Olympia for the 31st District Day at the Legislature on Wednesday, Feb. 25. The district day includes tours of the capitol campus, lunch with your legislators and a chance to see the Legislature in session. Additional information is also on back.

Of course you can also always contact my office in Olympia at anytime during the session by mail: P.O. Box 40600, Olympia, WA 98504-0600; phone: (360) 786-7846; or e-mail: robertso_er@leg.wa.gov.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Rep. Eric Robertson
31st District